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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help middle school students and their teachers analyze in-school study habits, providing 12 specific suggestions to help students succeed academically. Students need to understand the importance of: (1) school attendance; (2) good health; (3) paying attention in class; (4) effective note-taking skills; (5) picking a good seat in the classroom; (6) having the right materials for their assignments; (7) using the proper study skills for large group, small group, and individual learning situations; (8) listening and taking notes in class; (9) passing tests; (10) effective test taking strategies; (11) asking for help when they need it; and (12) teacher-student conferences and dialogue. A list of related resource materials is included. (Contains 11 references.) (MDM)

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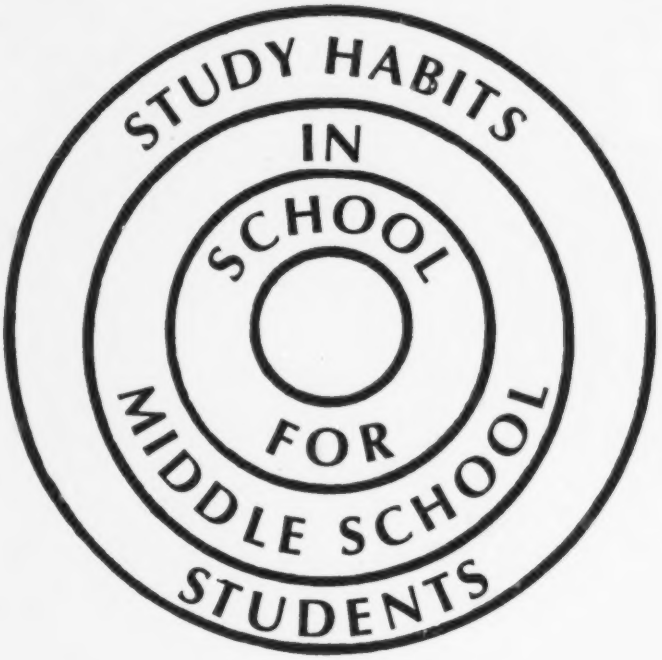

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Focus On
Study Habits In School

A Guide for Teachers and Students to Increase Learning In the Middle School

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Focus On Study Habits In School

A Guide for Teachers and Students to Increase Learning In the Middle School

STUDY HABITS IN SCHOOL

School days are often depicted as being almost idyllic, with happiness abounding and carefree time all day in school. The fact is that many middle school students are anxious and worried about many things in their young lives and this detracts from their ability to function well as learners.

1. Many students worry about their school work. Doing well in the middle school is important to each student. School performance is often a status symbol for students. Those who know the right answers or get good grades in their school studies are usually looked up to by classmates. Those students who do not do well in their studies often become discouraged and do not feel good about themselves. They worry about their school work and may begin to lose interest in school, skip school, or even resort to non-constructive behavior to gain the attention they desperately seek.
2. A common problem for some students is the lack of ability to concentrate on their studies. They are often easily distracted by what is going on near them. Many of these same students also have trouble remembering what they have read or heard in class discussions. The result is that time is lost and learning suffers.
3. Students with poor study habits fall behind in their work. It becomes even more difficult for them to concentrate and to remember as the work piles up and there is more and more to remember.
4. Another part of the problem of underachieving students is their poor use of study time. This may be due to lack of adequate study habits and of having to spend too much time on tasks that are relatively routine. It may also be due to lack of ability to concentrate and as a result, time will be wasted rather than being used constructively.

   If middle school students are going to be able to get the greatest benefit from their education, then certain steps need to be taken to help them study more effectively.

Positive Steps for Effective Study in School

Each of the suggestions that follow can help to make it possible for students to learn better in their middle school years. The decision

of which to use with each student depends upon the teacher's understanding of each particular student's study habit deficiencies. All of these can be helpful if used properly and in the right situation.

1. **School attendance is important.**

   Most students with poor grades often have poor school attendance records. The problem is a compounding one. If a student is not in school, he or she is not likely to learn as well and, not knowing the material being studied, is therefore more likely to be absent again.

   Students and their parents need to understand that it is important to be in school and to have the benefit of study there, with a teacher who can help and with the opportunity to use books and other study materials as well. Being absent simply isolates the student from the best learning environment.

2. **Good health and good study go together.**

   Whenever a student is not feeling well, it is very difficult to keep one's mind on school work. For good health and feeling good, it is important to take care of one's body. Middle school students who are growing rapidly need enough rest to permit their hearts, lungs and blood systems to catch up with the work the body must do. No one can study and learn unless they feel well and are rested.

3. **Paying attention in class is important.**

   First of all, it is important to be in school. It is also important to know what is going on in class. This means concentrating on what is being said in class and concentrating on what is being read in class. Teachers can help students concentrate by having them do these while they are listening to a speaker.

   —Think about the speaker's most important ideas. What are these?

   —Why do you think the speaker selected these ideas?

   —Try to think about some of your personal experiences that relate to what the speaker is discussing.

   —What are some interesting details the speaker points out?

   Some teachers like to use the TQLR formula for good listening.

   T—Tune in. Concentrate on the speaker.

Q—Question. What is the talk going to be about? What do you think the outcome will be?

L—Listen. Listen for the main points. Think ahead. Try to relate what you are learning to information you already know.

R—Review. Think back over the talk. Try to remember as many main points as possible.

Teachers can also suggest these for good listening.

- Pick a good seating location.
- Develop an interest in the topic.
- Organize your thinking.
- Try to think of what the next important point will be.
- Get the important points down in your notes. Keep them in mind too.
- What about your listening habits? Are you satisfied with them? How can you listen better?

4. **Taking notes.**

It is hard for some students to remember what was said in class. Encourage them to take notes. These will help the student to later recall what was said in class.

Try to help the student understand that taking notes does not mean writing down every word spoken in class. Pick out the important ideas and facts and write these down in a notebook. Remind students to write clearly as they will have to read their written notes later. Some students may want to review their notes at the end of each day and even rewrite these more carefully so that many days later they will be able to read them easily and understand them.

To make sure that a student's notes are accurate, the teacher may suggest that they pair up or form small cooperative learning groups of 3-4 students at the end of the period and compare their notes with each other. This will correct many mistakes and will form friendships as well.

5. **Picking a good seat in the classroom.**

Where a student sits can be important in study and learning. Sitting near one's best friends can be exciting and fun but teachers should be aware of when too much of a student's time is spent on "visiting" with friends and should change the seating with a friendly explanation to the student.

Teachers also need to make sure that students are seated where

they can hear speakers or discussions, and where they each have a clear view of the chalkboard or the screen on which slides and films are projected. The use of television in the classroom may make it necessary to rearrange seating so that all students can see and hear the programs being viewed.

6. **Having the right tools for the job.**

Teachers need to make certain that each student has the right materials for the study assignment. Pens or pencils, notebooks, paper and other materials needed should be where the student can use these. Any special materials needed for a study assignment should be available as well. Some students, more than others, will need to be reminded of this.

7. **Different sized groupings may call for different study habits.**

In **large study groups** of 25 to 100 or more, study skills and note-taking are especially important. This means that the student should not be distracted by the source of the noises that may occur in a large group and should be able to ignore these. Concentration is especially important here.

In **small groups** of 3 to 8, the students will have a chance to participate and contribute, as well as to gain information from listening. There are few enough students so that each one has a chance to take an active part in discussions. The exchange of ideas can help to lead to a better understanding of the topic being studied. Each student should be encouraged to contribute to discussions, raise questions and make comments to increase understanding by all students.

Individualized study calls for the right study habits. Each student learns at his or her own rate. How much a student learns in individual study depends on how well study habits are used.

These are some important points for students to keep in mind for effective study skills.

- Plan your work carefully.
- Make sure you understand the assignment. If you are not sure, ask your teacher for help.
- Try to use a variety of learning materials. In addition to the textbook, other books may have useful information. Be sure to also use other media such as tapes, filmstrips, slides, TV and computer programs on the topic of your study.
- As you use each of these materials, take careful notes on the information they have concerning the topic of your study.

- Later, review these notes to help you recall the information you found.
- Always remember to check with your teacher often to make sure you are on the right track. Don't forget that your teacher is there to help you.

8. **Listening and taking notes.**

When the teacher is talking to the students about the subject being studied, it is important for the student to get this valuable information. Here are some suggestions to help the student benefit from the teacher's classroom discussion.

- Sit in a good place in the classroom. Sitting near a window or door may not be a good idea. Distractions in the hallway or outside of the school building will hurt concentration on what the teacher is discussing. A better place to sit would be in the front or center of the classroom. This will make it easier to hear what the teacher is saying and also to have a better view of the chalkboard and the screen for projected pictures and information.
- Listen hard. Concentrate on what the teacher is saying. Pay no attention to any other noises or sounds in the room. Think about the main points that the teacher is making. Write these quickly in your notebook for later review. Concentrate! Concentrate! Concentrate!
- Listen for key ideas. It is not necessary to write down every word that the teacher is saying. Pick out the important ideas. Use these clues to help identify these. The teacher's voice may change or become louder when she is telling about something important. Or the teacher may say "here are three reasons for," which is a cue to the listener of some important facts. Sometimes the teacher will even say, "Now, listen to these points. They are important."
- Use a loose leaf notebook. The advantage is that extra pages can be added to different sections so that reading notes and lecture notes from class on the same topic will be together.
- Try to use your own shorthand. It is hard to write as fast as a teacher speaks and include every word. Just put down the important or key words. It may help to abbreviate long words, too. It helps to use an outline form, too. Only the important ideas go into an outline form. When a teacher uses an example, write the example down. Later, the examples will help recall the main ideas.

- Review and reorganize the class notes. When notes are written quickly during a class, they may need to be reorganized later. This should be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day.

9. **Passing tests.**

Taking tests is a part of school work. Some students do well on tests while others do poorly. The idea of taking a test will frighten some students and cause them to worry and become anxious. These are some things that can be done to help students overcome their fear of tests and also help students get better results on tests.

- Keep up with the studies. Reviewing reading notes and class notes regularly will help to keep the student from forgetting the important ideas in the lessons studied. This kind of regular review and preparation for a test will decrease the student's worry as well.
- Know about the kinds of tests that your teacher gives. Objective tests call for many facts. Memorization will be important in preparing for this kind of test. Essay tests call for general ideas. Teachers will often tell students what kind of test will be given. If not, students may ask about this before the test as a way of knowing how to study for it.
- Students should try to have a positive attitude about taking a test. Remember that test results will help a teacher make better plans for the next studies for the students.
- Physical condition is important. Students should get a good night's sleep before a test. This will also help self-confidence. If the student has studied and prepared for the test, feelings about taking the test should be more positive and without excess worry.
- Try to remember what materials are needed for the test. The teacher will indicate what will be needed. This usually means paper, pencil or pen, eraser and any other materials mentioned by the teacher. It might also be a good idea to have more than one pencil or pen in case it breaks.
- Try to get to the room a few minutes early. Then select a good seat and make yourself comfortable. Try to relax by taking a few deep breaths before the test starts. Then just do your best.

10. **More tips on tests.**

If the student has followed these suggestions, then everything is ready for the test. These suggestions will help the student.

- Once the test questions have been passed out, read the directions first. Then read these again to make sure of what is expected. If the student is not sure about the directions, the teacher should be asked for clarification.
- Next, the student should scan the whole test, looking over the parts quickly to see how long it is, how many parts or sections there are, etc.
- The next step is to decide on how much time to spend on each section of the test. If it is an essay test, the amount of time for each essay question should be decided. Leave a few minutes before the end of the class period so that there will be time to go back over the test and make any corrections that are necessary.
- Begin by answering the easier questions first. When this is done, then answer the harder questions as well as possible. The student should not hesitate to make a good guess on any uncertain question. Later, go back and check these answers a second time. On most tests, taking a chance can often mean a better score if there is no penalty for wrong answers.
- Before the end of the test period, go back and recheck as many answers as possible, especially the ones marked as uncertain. The student should not hesitate to change an answer if it now appears to be incorrect.

11. **Helping the student who falls behind.**

Some students may not keep up with their assigned studies. The reasons for their falling behind will vary widely. Whatever the reasons for their distraction, they need help to get their study habits corrected and to get caught up on their school work. Students should be encouraged to seek help from their teacher when they need it. Developing an open climate in the classroom will make it much easier for a student to approach a teacher with a problem about studies. A smile, a kind word, or any other display of friendliness can do much to allay a student's fears and make it easier for a student to approach the teacher for help.

12. **The teacher-student conference.**

Some teachers prefer not to wait for the student to make the first move for help. They may schedule a brief 3 or 4 minute min-conference with each student at least once each week, or more often, to find out if the student has any anxieties or concerns that can be addressed.

At such a conference, care needs to be taken by the teacher

to have the student relaxed and at ease. Together, they can go over the student's books, notebooks and assignments and try to find any places where the student seems to be having some difficulty and then together plan the best way of correcting the study problem. Teachers using the scheduled conference like it because it takes the onus off the student who must ask for help but is afraid to do so because it may make him appear to his classmates to be inadequate or unsuccessful. With the scheduled mini-conferences, **every** student has a chance to talk to the teacher and no one is singled out for ridicule for asking for help. Teachers also like the scheduled mini-conference because it forces them to be mindful of **all** of the students, especially the shy and quiet ones who might not approach the teacher for help otherwise even though they need it.

Whatever is decided on in the mini-conference can be checked on in subsequent days as the teacher observes the study habits and progress of the individual student. Further, when the student recognizes that the teacher will, in a friendly and helpful way, be checking on his progress, he is more likely to follow the plans that the two of them made together in the min-conference.

The time spent in school can result in better learning by students if teachers make use of the ideas suggested as they work with students in middle school grades.

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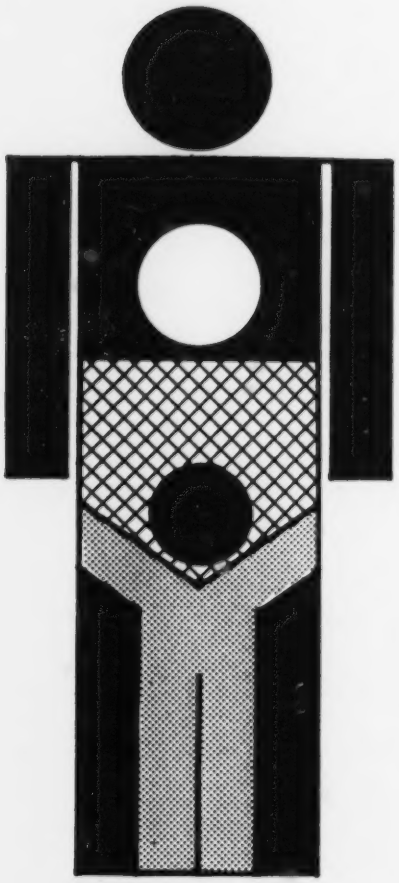

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